NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5979
MARK HOPKINS/BERLIN JULY 11, 1978

SUMMIT--CARTER TOWN MEETING

ANNCR:

DURING HIS VISIT THIS WEEK TO WEST GERMANY, PRESIDENT CARTER SCHEDULED A FLIGHT TO BERLIN THIS SATURDAY, WHERE HE WILL HOLD A TOWN MEETING. VOA'S MARK HOPKINS HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM WEST BERLIN.

VOICE:

ONE THOUSAND BERLINERS ARE BEING CHOSEN NOW TO MEET IN WEST BERLIN'S CONGRESS HALL, AND TO PUT QUESTIONS TO PRESIDENT CARTER DURING HIS FEW HOURS IN THIS DIVIDED CITY. THRE HAS NEVER BEEN ANYTHING LIKE A TOWN MEETING DURING AN AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL VISIT. ONCE A YEAR THERE IS A DAY OF THE OPEN DOOR IN WEST BERLIN, WHEN BERLINERS MEET IN THE SCHOENEBERG CITY HALL, AND QUESTION MEMBERS OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES. BUT THE TOWN MEETING IS DIFFERENT.

PRESIDENT CARTER WILL TAKE QUESTIONS ON ANY SUBJECT FROM A REPRESENTATIVE CITIZENS GROUP IN THIS CITY OF TWO MILLION. THE WEST BERLIN SENATE IS CHOOSING THE GROUP -- HALF OF WHOM WILL BE FROM A GROUP CALLED THE FRIENDSHIP FORCE. THIS IS THE NAME OF A PRIVATE PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE EXCHANGE BEGUN BY AN AMERICAN MINISTER. CITIZENS OF BERLIN AND THE AMERICAN CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS HAVE VISITED ONE ANOTHER UNDER THE FRIENDSHIP FORCE PROGRAM. AND SOME OF THESE WEST BERLINERS WILL BE IN THE CONGRESS HALL ALONG WITH OTHER BUSINESS MEN, WORKERS, HOUSE WIVES, AND STUDENTS FOR THE TELEVISED TOWN MEETING.

AMERICAN DIPLOMATS EXPECT THE QUESTIONS WILL RANGE ACROSS THE MAJOR INTERNATIONAL ISSUES TO THE SPECIAL CONCERNS OF WEST BERLINERS. THEY ARE LIKELY TO ASK ABOUT PRESIDENT CARTER'S VIEWS

ON SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS, ON THE STRATEGIC ARMS LIMITATION AGREEMENT, OR TROOP REDUCTION NEGOTIATIONS IN CENTRAL EUROPE.

THERE MAY BE QUESTIONS, DIPLOMATS HERE SAY, ABOUT THE NEUTRON BOMB OR ABOUT DRUG USE AMONG AMERICAN TROOPS. THE CASE OF RUDOLPH BAHRO MAY COME UP -- THE EAST GERMAN COMMUNIST PARTY FUNCTIONARY, WHO WROTE A BOOK SHARPLY CRITICAL OF COMMUNIST SYSTEMS AND HAS JUST BEEN IMPRISONED FOR EIGHT YEARS FOR TREASON.

THE CENTRAL QUESTIONS FOR WEST BERLINERS, HOWEVER, IS THE WESTERN COMMITMENTS TO THEIR CITY, ISOLATED AS IT IS INSIDE EAST GERMANY, AND SURROUNDED BY SOVIET TROOPS. DIPLOMATS SAY THAT PRESIDENT CARTER WILL LIKELY BE ASKED IN THE TOWN MEETING ABOUT THE AMERICAN COMMITMENT TO BERLIN....ABOUT WHAT THE AMERICANS ARE WILLING TO DO TO PROTECT WEST BERLINERS.

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